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ARAMAEANS AND ASSYRIANS IN NORTH-WESTERN SYRIA: MATERIAL EVIDENCE FROM TELL AFIS

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Résumé – Les fouilles récentes menées par l'Université de Pise sur le site de Tell Afis dans le district d'Idlib ont éclairé d'un jour nouveau la culture syrienne de l'âge du Fer, grâce aux données nouvelles issues de l'un des plus grands sites araméens de Syrie occidentale. Un puissant rempart dans la ville basse et un vaste temple *in antis* sur l'acropole montrent combien le site était florissant au Fer II-III, depuis l'époque de l'indépendance du royaume araméen de Lu'ash jusqu'à la soumission au roi assyrien et à la transformation en province assyrienne. Les derniers résultats des fouilles renforcent l'hypothèse d'une identification de Tell Afis avec l'Araméenne Hazrek, confirmant la continuité de l'occupation et la persistance de son bâtiment religieux principal pendant la période assyrienne, quand le site, siège d'un gouverneur assyrien, est connu sous le nom d'Hatarikka. Des éléments de tradition araméenne sont progressivement mêlés à des objets de culture assyrienne donnant une image vivante de la continuité de la culture matérielle qui assimile des éléments étrangers innovants.

Abstract – Recent archaeological excavations by the University of Pisa at the site of Tell Afis, in the district of Idlib, have shed new light on Syrian culture in the Iron Age, bringing new evidence from one of the largest Aramaean settlements in western Syria. The massive city wall in the lower town and a large sacred building of the *in antis* type on the acropolis show how this site was flourishing between Iron Age II and III, from the times of the independent Aramaean kingdom of Lu'ash until its submission to the Assyrian king and its transformation into an Assyrian province. The most recent excavation results strengthen the hypothesis of the identification of Tell Afis with Aramaean Hazrek, also confirming the continuity of occupation of the site and the persistence of its main religious building in the Assyrian period, when the site is recorded as Hatarikka, the seat of an Assyrian governor. Elements of Aramaean tradition gradually mix with objects of Assyrian culture giving a vivid picture of the continuity of the local material culture as it absorbed innovative foreign elements.

خلاصة – أُلقت الحفريات الحديثة التي قامت بها جامعة بيز في موقع تلّ أفيس من محافظة إدلب ضوءاً جديداً على الحضارة السورية في العصر الحديدي، وذلك بفضل براهين جديدة وجدت في أحد أكبر المواقع الآرامية في سورية الغربية. يُظهر سور ضخّم في المدينة السفلى ومعبد كبير مع مدخل في المدينة العليا (الأكروبول) إزدهار هذا الموقع في العصر الحديدي الثاني والثالث وذلك منذ عهد إستقلال مملكة لوعش الآرامية حتى الخضوع للأشوريين وتحوّله إلى مقاطعة آشورية. تُثبت النتائج الأخيرة للحفريات فرضية مطابقت تلّ أفيس مع Hazrek (أزرك) الآرامية مؤكدة إستمرار الإحتلال وبقاء دور المعبد الرئيسي في الحقة الآشورية حيث عُرِف الموقع بإسم Hatarikka (أتاريكا) الذي كان مقر الحاكم الآشوري. إمتزجت تدريجياً عناصر ذات تأثير آرامي بمواد من الحضارة الآشورية مُعطية صورة حيّة لاستمرارية الثقافة المادية التي تستوعب عناصر غريبة مستحدثة.

Iron Age Syria provides a case for a multi-faceted approach to exploring a region open to various cultural contacts and influences. The Assyrian–Aramaean interaction is probably one of the most interesting issues, as the “histories” of Aramaean Syria and Assyria share during the first half of the 1st millennium BC traits of a linked common path, which Irene Winter has labelled, from the point of view of visual art, as “a complex feedback-loop of mutual interaction”¹. Of course this east-west channel is only one of the possible interpretative means to understand the complex cultural and historical dynamics characterising this period of the ancient Near East. The “extended frontiers”² of Syrian Iron Age material culture could lead us to look for *stimuli* and comparisons northwards into the Anatolian plateau³ and southwards in the southern Levant and in the coastal towns and harbours of Phoenicia, as well as westwards to the Mediterranean shores⁴.

The aim of this paper is to provide some new reflections on the topic of this interaction by reviewing some of the archaeological data coming from the recent excavations conducted by the University of Pisa in Tell Afis, one of the largest Iron Age settlements in north-western inner Syria⁵.

Afis is a large tell of 25 ha lying in the district of Idlib, some 45 km south-west of Aleppo, between the fertile plain of the *Jazr* and the eastern alluvial depression of the *Madkh*. It consists of a large lower town of rounded shape and of an acropolis located in the northern half of the tell (**fig. 1**). Afis is the site where the Aramaic stele of king Zakkur (KAI 202) was found; the French Consul Henri Pognon found it on the acropolis of the tell in 1903 and it is now in the Louvre Museum⁶. The inscription mentions the re-edification of Hazrek. Zakkur’s new capital of the kingdom of Hamath and Lu’ash, which is generally identified with Afis⁷. The site was then noticed by William Albright in 1932 and finally chosen for archaeological excavations in 1962 by the Italian Archaeological Mission in Syria directed by Paolo Matthiae. Since 1986 excavations have been directed by Stefania Mazzoni, leading a joint project of the Universities of Pisa, Florence, Bologna and Rome.

During these last 20 years the study of the evidence of the Aramaean town of Afis has been among the primary goals of the Italian expedition; excavation trenches have been opened in different parts of the tell where pottery collected from the surface gave an indication that levels dating to the Iron Age periods might be found.

Though Afis provided scarce evidence of written texts we will try here to include in the discussion some of the information collected from recent excavations in order to add new reflections to the Assyrian–Aramaean interaction during Iron Age II and III⁸.

THE LOWER TOWN: AREA D AND B

The Iron Age II–III Lower Town coincides with the maximum extension of the site, even though part of the Iron Age settlement was also situated *extra moenia*⁹. The Lower Town has been excavated in two different areas: Area D, in the southern part of the site, and Area B, along the northern limit of the

1. WINTER 1987, p. 369.

2. MAZZONI 1999, p. 147.

3. On intercultural processes between Aramaeans and Luwians, see NOVAK 2005, with case studies from Zincirli/Sam’al and Tell Halaf/Guzana; on Tell Ahmar/Masuwar/Til Barsip, see BUNNENS 1995 and 1999; on Tell Taynat/Kunulua, HARRISON 2001; see also MAZZONI 1994.

4. On the relations of Syria with the Greek world in the Iron Age, see MAZZONI 2001a, with bibliography.

5. I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. Stefania Mazzoni who encouraged me during this study and permitted me to publish the Afis materials. My gratitude also goes to Prof. Christine Kepinski and Dr. Aline Tenu who invited me at the workshop held in Rome during the 6th ICAANE. I would also like to thank Prof. Serena Maria Cecchini for her precious advices and Dr. Gunnar Lehmann and Dr. Robert Grutz for their kind permission to use their drawings.

6. DUSSAUD 1922, p. 175–76; LIVERANI 1965, p. 108; p. 110–12.

7. MAZZONI 2008a, p. 7–11; MAZZONI 1994, p. 323.

8. On the evidence of Iron Age I in Tell Afis and the question of the origins of Aramaeans in western Syria, see recent discussion in VENTURI 2007, p. 417–426.

9. MAZZONI 1987, p. 25.

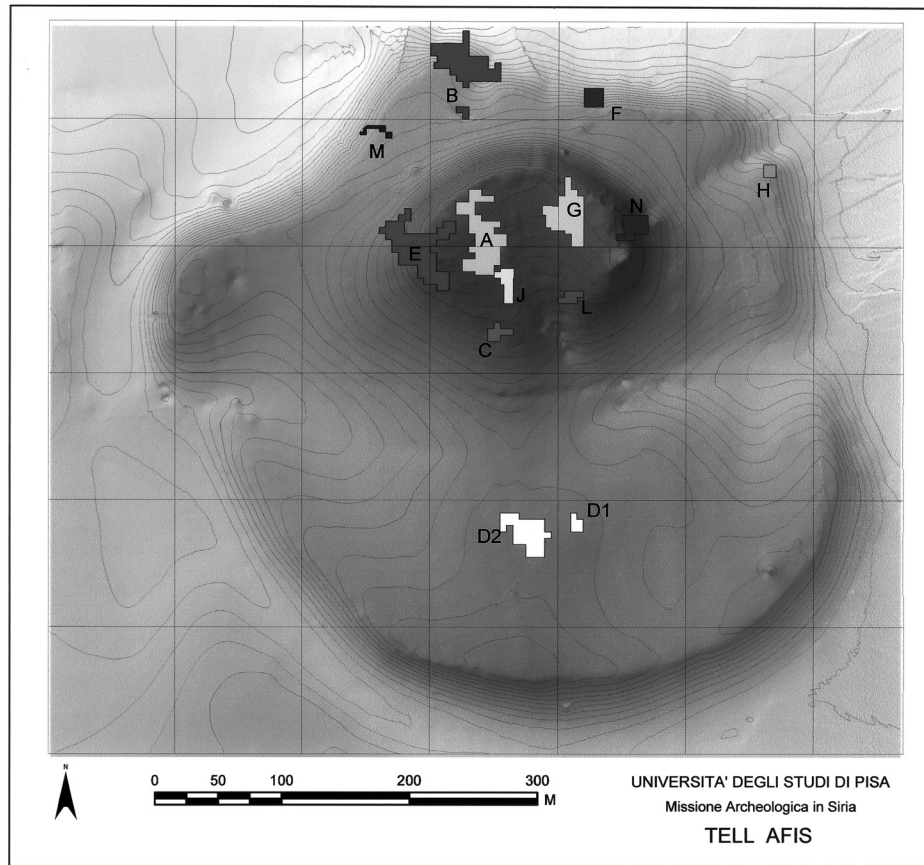


Figure 1: Contour map of Tell Afis with excavation trenches.

tell, on the line of the ancient enclosure of the town wall. These two excavation areas have provided a complex stratigraphy of levels dating to the Iron Age II–III.

Area D's lowest level (Level 10) belongs to MB II and the upper one, Level 9, contains materials to be dated to IA I: all the succeeding occupation layers (Levels 8–1) show a continuous development of a domestic area between IA II and IA III. We will focus our attention on Level 4, for which a date of the end of the 8th century has been proposed by Mazzoni on the basis of the pottery assemblage, and Level 2, dated to the following phase within the 7th century BC¹⁰. In Level 4 a large domestic structure measuring 20 x 25 m has been excavated; this house is characterised by three different functional areas¹¹, where storage jars were in place inside floors, and an area served as a kitchen for preparing food; the central area was occupied by a square courtyard. Pottery from these rooms is characterised by homogenous *orange ware* fabrics and by shapes such as carinated bowls (shape CA of Afis Iron Age typology¹²), jars with double rims (shape GA)¹³ and jars with inflated rims (shape GB)¹⁴. All of these pottery types are assessed in Gunnar Lehmann's *Assemblage* 1¹⁵. Area D's Level 2 also contains a domestic building

10. MAZZONI 1987, p. 33.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

12. *Ibid.*, fig. 15, 9–13. For Afis Iron II pottery typology and comparisons, see OGGIANO 1997.

13. *Ibid.*, fig. 18, 2–4.

14. *Ibid.*, fig. 18, 5–14.

15. LEHMANN 1996, p. 102; 26 (Tab. 2.4.1).

which maintains the same wall orientation as the previous complex; in the pottery assemblage (Lehmann *Assemblage* 2–3) of this level we find bowls with a triangular rim which can be dated to the 7th century BC (shape CC)¹⁶.

The Area B excavation, on the northern limit of the site, has in recent years given interesting results with occupation levels of IA II–III, where a domestic quarter was obliterated by the building of the imposing defensive town wall. The domestic area provided a fine sample of well stratified pottery found *in situ* belonging to the local IA II level¹⁷, corresponding to the assemblage of Level 4 in Area D (**fig. 2**). The remains of the house were sealed by a thick layer of fallen mud bricks which had been levelled to serve as a building surface for erecting further constructions¹⁸. Over this layer of packed debris, the massive defensive town wall was superimposed, probably after a short lapse of time (**fig. 3**). The town wall, which reaches a width of 5.2 m, was built without any foundation and without plaster; its only peculiar feature is a row of standing mud bricks at the bottom forming a kind of a step, probably to avoid infiltration of rain-water at its base. Pottery coming from levels pertaining to the wall, although not strictly *in situ*, belongs to the end of the local IA II–early IA III, generally similar to that of Level 2 of Area D.

We can put particular emphasis on two points concerning Area B:

1. An imposing defensive wall seems to have been built all of a sudden (without plaster and without foundations, but *c.* 5 m wide¹⁹) directly over a domestic quarter in use during the second half of the 8th century, whereas materials coming from the collapse of the wall can be dated to the early 7th century, within a general homogeneity and continuity of pottery assemblage.

2. On the northern side of the tell the Aramaean town of IA II seems to lie directly upon the ruins of the MB town, without any architectural evidence for LB or IA I periods, which are instead largely attested on the acropolis²⁰. During IA II, Afis reaches its largest extent, lying directly upon the ruins of the MB town and testifying to the demographic growth of the town in the Aramaean period.

THE ACROPOLIS: AREA G AND A

We have briefly described the situation in the Lower Town. The evidence from the acropolis is of course more complex, due to various factors. The first is the different kind of archaeological record which comes from an area where imposing public buildings have been built over the centuries: frequent cutting, filling and rebuilding activities of large buildings have caused big losses in the underlying archaeological layers. A further difficulty lies in the protracted spoliation of ancient buildings during Late Antiquity and Medieval times: in this period the ancient tell, especially its uppermost part, became a source of masonry materials used in the nearby village²¹.

In Area E, on the western slope of the acropolis, excavations conducted since 1988 have shown a continuity of occupation from the Bronze Age II to the Early Iron Age II, filling the gap of the so-called “Dark Age” in the archaeological documentation and providing a well stratified sequence of architectural remains and materials²². During all phases of IA I, within the period between the 12th and 10th century, urban plan and building orientation changed in gradually through the peaceful and necessary evolution and reorganisation of private and public spaces²³. A break is recorded at the end of the phase II of

16. MAZZONI 1987, fig. 10, 1–5; OGGIANO 1997, p. 191 for 7th century date and comparisons.

17. VIRGILIO 2005, p. 40–41.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

19. MAZZONI 2002, p. 18.

20. MAZZONI 2000a, p. 8–9; VENTURI 2007, p. 126.

21. In the western part of the acropolis (Area A) Byzantine and Islamic pottery without any related architectural structures have been found (see D’AMORE 2005, p. 20).

22. See a detailed synthesis of Area E excavations in VENTURI 2007.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 199.



a



b

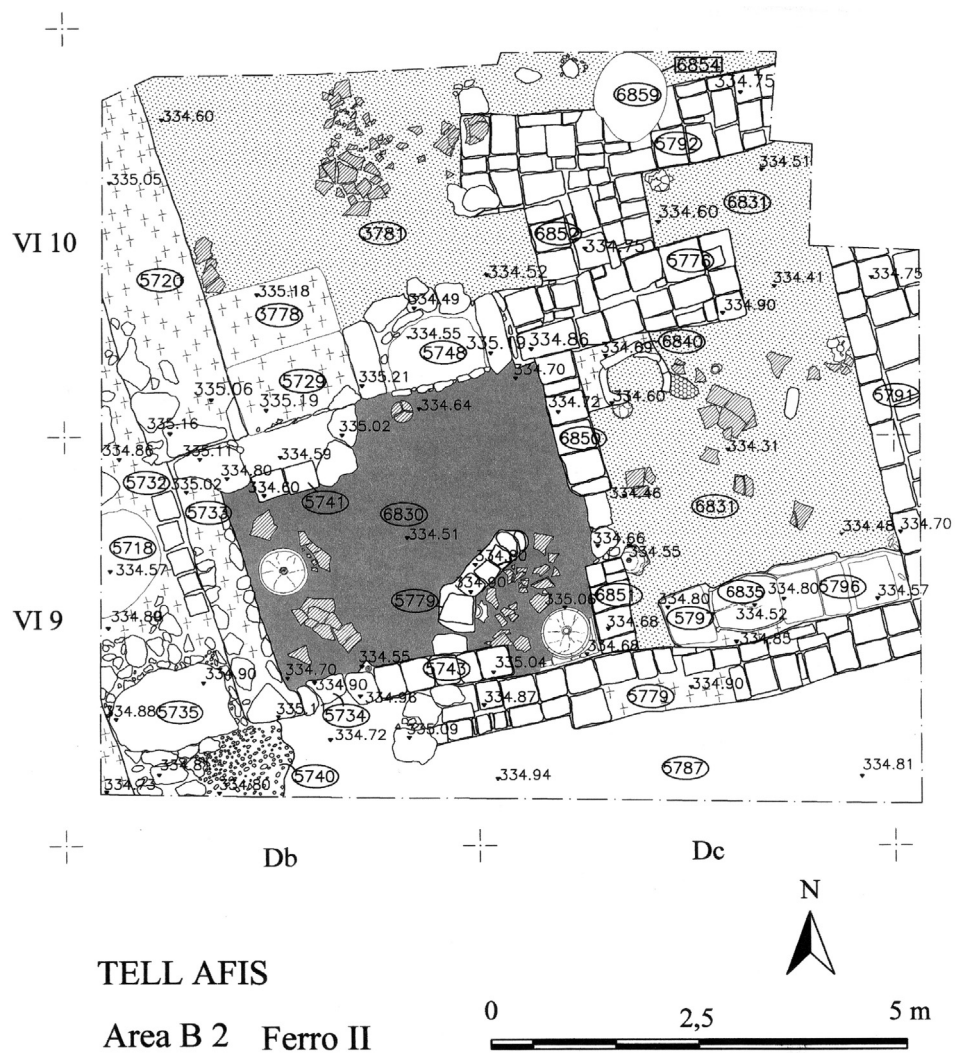


Figure 2 a-c: Photo (S. Mazzoni) and plan (P Del Vesco) of Area B domestic quarter under enclosure wall © Archivio Missione Archeologica a Tell Afis.

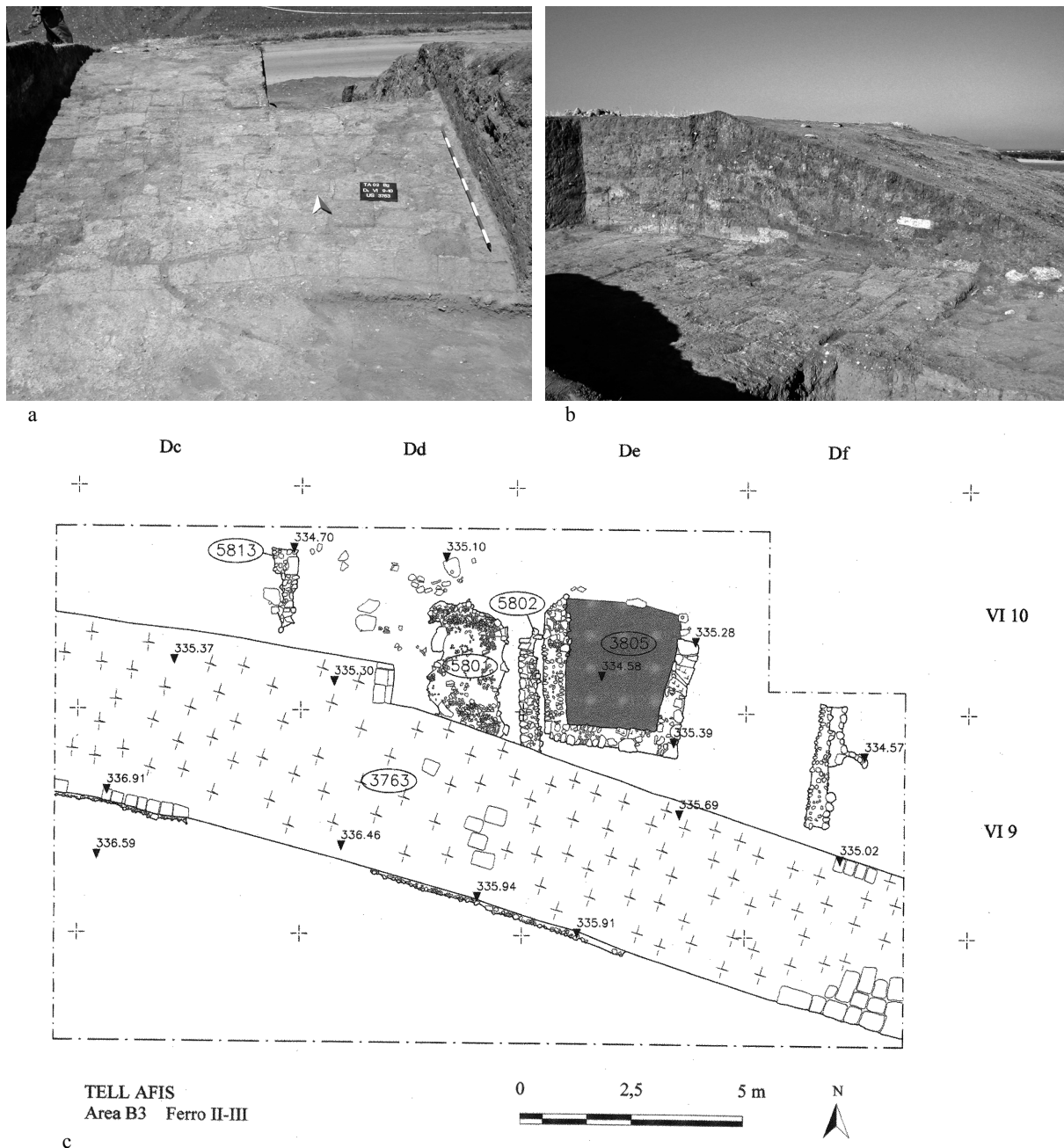


Figure 3 a-c: Photo (S. Mazzoni) and plan (P. Del Vesco) of Area B enclosure wall (US 3763)
 © Archivio Missione Archeologica a Tell Afis.

Iron Age I: layers of ashes separate this period from the last architectural phase documented in Area E (Phase Ic-a)²⁴. This last period belongs to the Early Iron Age II, in a pottery horizon of the middle of 9th century (appearance of first sherds of *Red Slip* ware)²⁵.

The acropolis and its two main areas of excavation, namely G and A, bring us to the core of the main question: investigations conducted between 1989 and 2000 in Area G and still ongoing in Area A, show that the main official buildings of the site were situated here, during the town's Aramaean period and most probably still existed (at least in Area A) in the succeeding Assyrian period.

24. VENTURI 2007, p. 161–165.

25. MAZZONI 1998a, p. 169; DEGLI ESPOSTI 1998.

In Area G, on the eastern side of the acropolis, a large paved square courtyard of 15.5 x 15 m has been excavated (**fig. 4a**): mud brick walls, built without plaster and without foundations, rose to a height of 8 m. The building was cut deep within the Iron Age I levels, in a square pit 20 x 20 m, to a depth of 5 m below the surface, so that the walls rose about 3 m above the ground floor. No access point has been found around the four sides; probably the structure was accessible by a removable device, such as a wooden staircase²⁶.

Serena Cecchini, who conducted work on the area, has clearly distinguished a level (8b) sealed underneath the collapse of the mud brick wall (**fig. 4b**), with pottery preserved between the cobbled floor and the collapsed bricks. The assemblage of the materials coming from this layer resembles that of Level 4 in Area D, with double rims jars (shape GA), bowls with angular inward thickened rim (shape CN) and *Red Slip* hemispherical bowls with simple rim (shape CG)²⁷. Shortly after the collapse of the structure, the whole area became a massive dump which was slowly filled with pottery, ashes and animal bones; the deepest layers contain a very large amount of materials, which gradually become more irregular. The uppermost layers, especially 7–6, show a great quantity of *Red Slip* fragments, unlike anything found elsewhere in Tell Afis (**fig. 5a-c**). Burnished *Red Slip* pottery is a local production which presents standardised characteristics: some items are accurately fired and wholly covered with a thick layer of dark red slip and a remarkable finishing of the surface, but the majority part of the fragments show a very light splashing of orange-red wash just below the rim and a cursive burnishing made by a stick. The depression of the great courtyard had been gradually filled by the end of IA II and the beginning of IA III, in the last part of the 8th century and during the 7th century²⁸.

No other monumental building was erected in this eastern part of the acropolis after the collapse of the square courtyard, as all the other IA III remains excavated in the north-eastern corner of Area G document little domestic buildings with no stratigraphic relation to the courtyard building²⁹.

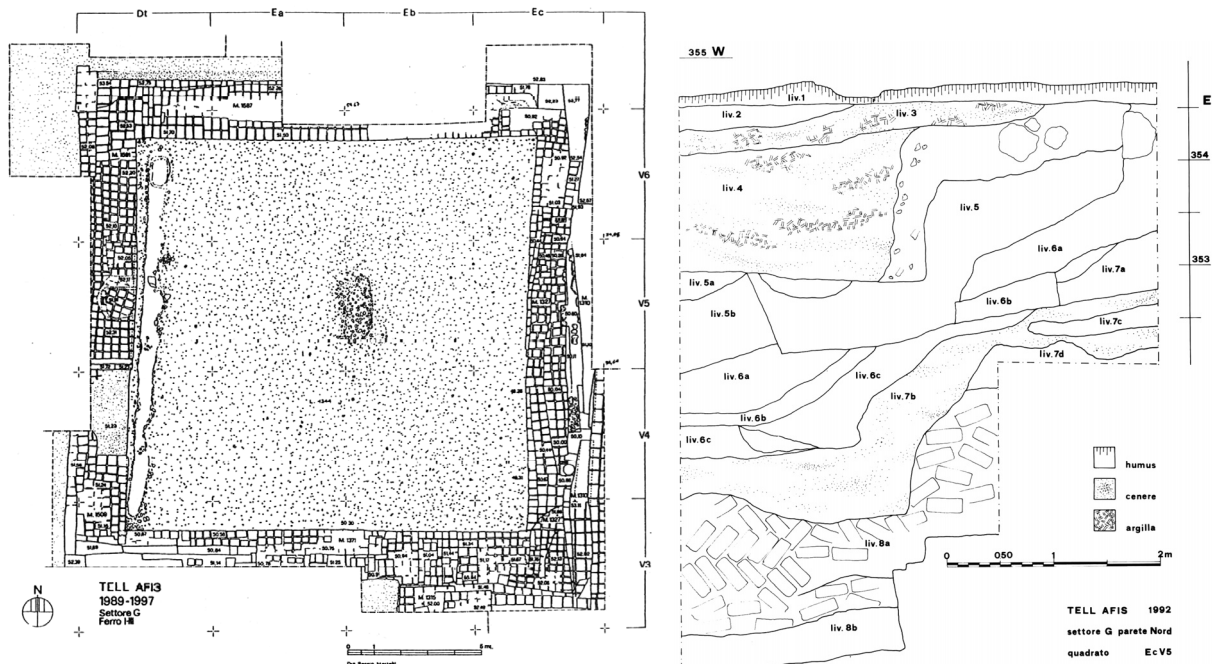


Figure 4a: Plan of squared courtyard in Area G, from CECCHINI 2000a, fig. 1; 4b: Section of collapsed mud brick walls inside the courtyard, from CECCHINI 1998, fig. 7.

26. CECCHINI 2000a, p. 201.

27. CECCHINI 1998, p. 284–285; fig. 18: 10; 9; 3.

28. CECCHINI 2000a, p. 201–202.

29. CECCHINI 2000b, p. 20–21.

From a historical point of view the evidence of Area G seems to document a large ceremonial unit of the Aramaean town of the 8th century which is collapsed for unknown reasons: stability problems? earthquake? conquest or voluntary destruction? The first hypothesis seems the more probable given both the structure of the walls (1.8 m wide at the bottom and 2.2 at the top, leaning on the more ancient accumulation of Iron Age I and without any foundation) and the absence of traces of destruction in the 8b Level between the floor and the collapsed wall: Cecchini also hypothesizes that the building was not even finished at the time of the collapse, because of the absence of plaster on the walls which would normally have been essential for a big open area building such as this one³⁰. At the end of the 8th century, i.e. shortly after the conquest of Hazrek/Hatarikka by the army of Tiglath-pileser III in 738 BC or even after the conquest of Hama by Sargon II in 720, the courtyard was already out of use: should we relate this fact to the Assyrians and to their conquest of the region of Afis or to dynamics internal to the settlement which remain hidden from our knowledge?

In the upper layers of the collapsed structure a sherd has been found with three inscribed Aramaic letters: *l w r* (**fig. 5f**). If correctly interpreted, these could be the letters of the name of the god Ilu-Wēr, the one cited on the Zakkur stele as his protector and to whom the king would have built a great temple in the 'Apš, probably the ancient sacred district, i.e. the acropolis, of the new re-founded capital Hazrek³¹.

From the upper fill of the square courtyard, between the hundreds of sherds of *Red Slip* ware, local and imported pottery, we can also recognise some peculiar samples completely different from our local common and fine wares. Among these are some pottery fragments³² not sharing the classical local features of fabrics and morphology, probably belonging to an eastern pottery horizon of Neo-Assyrian productions of the 7th century BC (**fig. 5d-e**).

From the comparisons with the evidence previously reviewed, we can trace a line which connects Area G Level 8b, i.e. the period between the construction of the square courtyard and the collapse of its mud brick walls, with Area D Level 4 with its domestic multifunctional building and Area B at a period before the construction of the big town wall. The general picture drawn from all this archaeological evidence is that of a flourishing Aramaean centre during the 8th century BC, reaching its maximum width on the northern and southern limits of the Lower Town. This, if we try to link our archaeological documentation to the few epigraphic records, would correspond to the town “re-founded” by Zakkur, king of Hamath and Lu'ash. Of course this is not the town at the time of the king himself, who would have reigned, according to the date of the inscription and to other historical sources³³, at the very end of the 9th century and in the first quarter of the 8th century BC³⁴, but the town of a few decades later, when the Lu'ash kingdom was still independent between the time of the Turtānu Šamši-ilu and the campaigns of Tiglath-pileser III in North Syria³⁵. At the end of this period or shortly after it became necessary to provide Afis with a big defensive wall, probably built in a very short time on levelled debris sealing IA II materials still *in situ*: the well-stratified pottery leaves us in no doubt that we are not dealing with the wall Zakkur claims to have built around Hazrek as defence against the army of the King of Aram-Damascus and his seventeen allies, but with a wall that had to defend the town at least half a century later. We can suppose that its aim was to defend the town from the army of Tiglath-pileser III or of Sargon II, when already-conquered Hatarikka joined an anti-Assyrian revolt led by the king of Hamath Yau-bi'di³⁶.

30. CECCHINI 2000a, p. 201.

31. MAZZONI 1998b, p. 18; LIPIŃSKI 2000a, p. 256–257.

32. TA96G33/10 (see Tell Jurn Kebir: EIDEM, ACKERMANN 1999, fig. 8, 4; Sheikh Hassan, Typ Ab: SCHNEIDER 1999b, Abb. 1, 1–3); TA96G58/47; TA97G714/1.

33. See in particular the Antakya stele at the times of Adad-nīrārī III and Šamši-ilu, around 800 BC (DALLEY 2000, p. 87).

34. LIPIŃSKI 2000a, p. 254–255; p. 318.

35. The Eponym Chronicle refers to other three military campaigns in 772, 765 and 755 against Hatarikka, probably led by Šamši-ilu (HAWKINS 1982, p. 404–405; IKEDA 1999, p. 281–283; Tab. I).

36. LIPIŃSKI 2000a, p. 316.



Figure 5 a-c: *Red Slip* pottery from Area G; d-e: Fragment of carinated bowl of Neo-Assyrian type; f: Inscribed *ostrakon* with Aramaic letters (*lwr*). a-e: S. Soldi; f: M. Necci © Archivio Missione Archeologica a Tell Afis.

At any rate some questions remain unsolved: is there any evidence of the town wall mentioned by Zakkur? Is it plausible that a big Iron Age II town lying on the road between Arpad and Hamath was not provided with an enclosure wall before the second half of the 8th century? There is currently no archaeological data answering this question, because it seems that the excavated layers in Area B rest directly on Middle Bronze Age ruins. We can assume that the MB rampart was still functional for the Iron Age town, and probably part of the Iron Age II wall has been lost with the heavy erosion of the tell on this side of the settlement.

New archaeological records from the last campaigns come from the western acropolis of the tell. The first trenches in Tell Afis Area A were opened in 1970 under the direction of Matthiae. The work in this area led to the identification of a large official building with a long, plastered room which was thought to be the central room of a palace of the *bît hilani* type³⁷. The resumption of excavation in this sector since 2000 has widened the excavation area all around the structure and reached deep down to the foundation boulders of the building. The area suffered a continuous spoliation and demolition of ancient structures from late Classical times and during the Byzantine period, as numerous finds belonging to this age testify³⁸. The very poor state of preservation is particularly marked in the central part of the building, where evidence of stones being removed from their original place and broken to be carried away is particularly striking. The western and southern parts of the building, where a westward collapsed mud brick wall is still in place, are preserved better than the surrounding areas and can offer some useful record documenting the last phase of the structure³⁹.

37. MATTHIAE 1979.

38. Byzantine and Islamic pottery in D'AMORE 2005, fig. 16, 8–12; a Byzantine coin in SOLDI 2005, fig. 21, 4.

39. See a preliminary report in D'AMORE 2005 and SOLDI 2005.

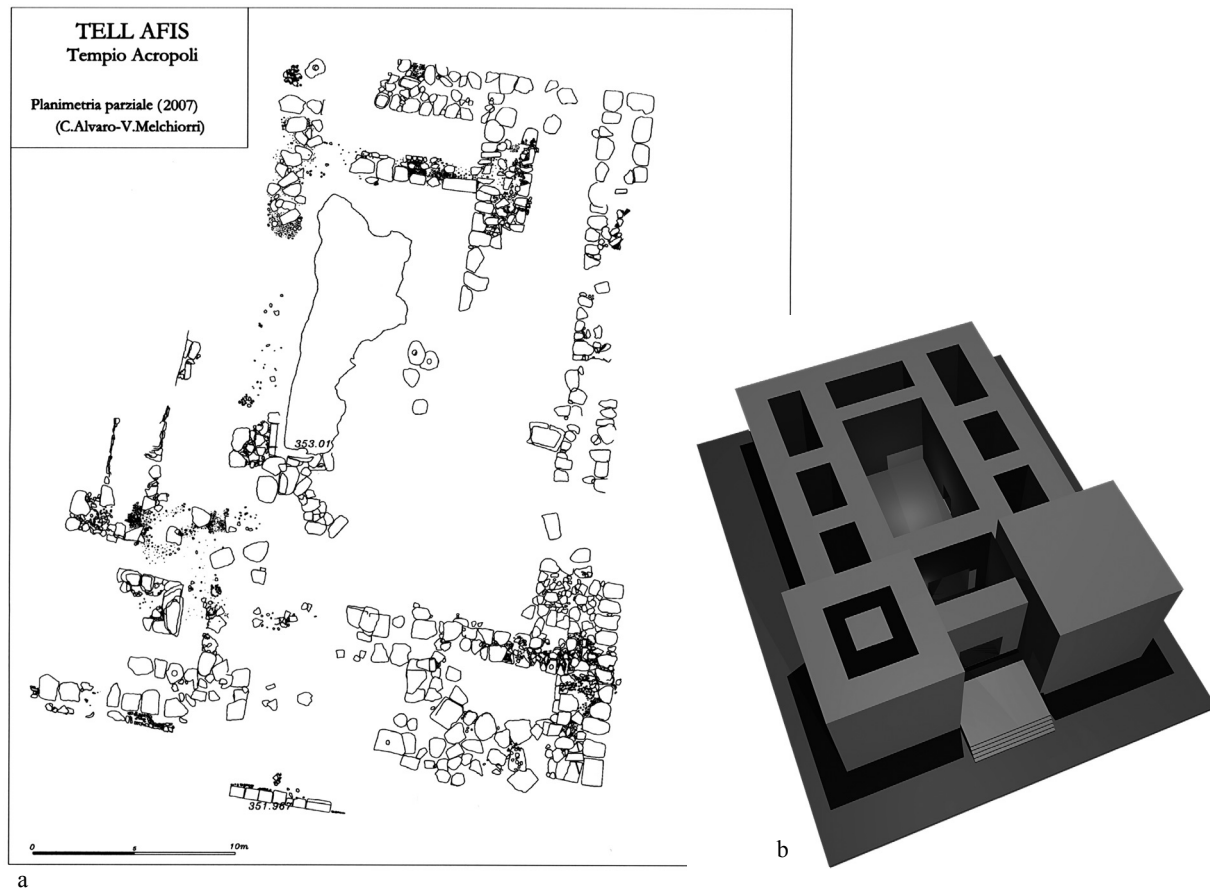


Figure 6 a: Plan of Temple AI in Area A (drawing by C. Alvaro and V. Melchiorri);
 b: Hypothetical reconstruction of Temple AI (3D elaboration by C. Alvaro) © Archivio Missione Archeologica a Tell Afis.

The great building on the western side of the Acropolis appears now, after the most recent excavation campaigns, to be without any doubt a typical *in antis* temple with a tripartite plan on a north-south longitudinal axis (Temple AI ; **fig. 6–7**)⁴⁰. Its impressive dimensions are testified by its 32 m long north-south extension and by the big boulders of its foundations. On the southern front a 8.5 m threshold cut in rectangular stones marks the main entrance to the building; the southern façade is flanked by two overhanging side towers, marking the south-western and south-eastern corners. The interior of the temple has been severely damaged by late spoliation and we can reconstruct the plan from the deepest layers of stone foundations. At any rate, the central room with its hard plastered floor and the western rooms flanking the central room are still clearly distinguishable, and still present the original floors of the last functional period. The striking and unparalleled dimensions of the building leads us to think that we are dealing with the main temple of the town, the one representing the main cult on the acropolis of the Aramaean town, probably dedicated to the Storm God. The north-south orientation clearly breaks with the north-east–south-west building orientation of the previous levels of the settlement that are attested underneath the western floor and in nearby Area E. Here a patent intention to rebuild the acropolis of the town in a new monumental style is clearly perceptible. Deep foundations 2.6 m wide, consisting of boulders, and the imposing collapse of the western mud brick wall show that the building would have had an extraordinary silhouette, probably visible from the plain surrounding Afis.

40. MAZZONI 2008b, p. 157; on the Afis temple in relation to other Iron Age *in antis* temples from northern Syria, see MAZZONI forthcoming a; on Syrian Iron Age temples, see MATTHIAE 1992 and WERNER 1994.



a



b

Figure 7: General photo of Temple AI from S (a) and from NE (b).
M. Necci © Archivio Missione Archeologica a Tell Afis.

Underneath Temple AI is some other sparse evidence of a second more ancient building (Temple AII) which it is impossible to reconstruct because of the cuttings of the upper temple and because of the deep spoliation of the structures. Under this, a third building (Temple AIII) with a plastered shrine is currently under excavation and has been tentatively dated to the 11th–10th century BC. The provenance from the fill of this temple of a seal depicting the Storm God on a bull, and a *kernos* vessel with a bull's head found on the floor during the last campaign, both support an identification with a Storm God temple⁴¹.

The persistence throughout the centuries of the Iron Age of the sacred area on the acropolis of Afis would strengthen the identification of this part of town with the 'Apš of the Zakkur inscription, as proposed by Edward Lipiński and Stefania Mazzoni⁴². This identification is supported by the long sequence of occupation levels down to the Chalcolithic Age in nearby Area E; the citadel of Afis, continuously inhabited from the beginning of the 4th millennium, could be identified with the references to *Apsu/Apsuna/Apzuna* in texts from Ebla, Ugarit and Alalakh, and was the centre known as *Apiš* of the new capital of the Lu'ash kingdom under king Zakkur⁴³.

From the ruins of the temple a fragment of a basalt stele with Aramaic inscription (**fig. 8a**) probably mentioning Haza'el and Jehu, kings of Aram and Israel in the last quarter of 9th century BC⁴⁴, testifies to the importance of the sacred area; numerous broken fragments of carved basalt (**fig. 8b–d**) show that all around this area iconographic and epigraphic documents were displayed, which were lost once the area began to serve as an open quarry (**fig. 7a**)⁴⁵. On the western and southern external sides of the temple archaeological contexts were much better preserved. From the levels sealed by the collapse of the western wall we isolated pottery belonging to Iron Age III, amongst which were carinated bowls, bowls with triangular rims, jars with inflated rim and hole-mouth cooking pots⁴⁶. A peculiar feature of various spots in the area outside the temple building are funnels or pipes with one simple end and the other end finishing in a plain outward-curving rim with a greenish-white glazed interior surface (**fig. 9–10**); some of them present a vertical horn (**fig. 9–10**). Although their function is not yet clear, their provenance is always associated with the collapse of the outer wall of the temple; none come from inside the precincts but they are in evidence everywhere along the four external sides of the temple. The stratigraphic position of these unique objects have lead us to formulate different hypotheses, one being that these funnels were cultic, and a second being that they served as a kind of wall decoration on the exteriors façades; in this second hypothesis, which seems more plausible, these pipes would have been set into the wall by the simple end so that the flaring glazed side was visible, probably with the horn on the lower side, maybe to collect rain water and prevent it from falling directly at the base of the temple walls. The glazed surface would have had a double function as both decorative and an water-proofing device.

41. MAZZONI 2008a, p. 26–27; fig. 34–35.

42. LIPINSKI 2000a, p. 257 and bibliography; MAZZONI 1998b, p. 18; MAZZONI 2001b, p. 100. This hypothesis is supported also by Herbert NIEHR (2003, p. 94), relying on the distinction in Zakkur's inscription on a memorial part (the siege of Hazrek) and a dedicatory part (the building and restoration of Ilu-Wēr temple in *Apiš*); on this issue see also PARKER 1997, p. 108–109, and his hypothesis of two different cities for Hazrek and *Apiš*. *Contra* PARPOLA 1987, p. 134, who locates Hatarikka in southern Syria (i.e. near Damascus) as the city is named in a text of Bel-duri governor of Damascus, and HAWKINS 1987, p. 161, and 1995, p. 96, who identifies modern Afis with ancient *Apiš* of the stele and believes that Hazrek/Hatarikka could be more probably a site in the neighbourhood of Afis (HAWKINS 1995a, p. 96, n. 101, also excludes Parpola's hypothesis of locating Hazrek west of Damascus).

43. MAZZONI 2001b, p. 99–100; see discussion in DION 1997, p. 141–143 and LIPINSKI 2000a, p. 255–258. On *Áb-zu^{ki}* in the Ebla texts see ARCHI, PIACENTINI & POMPONIO 1993, p. 147, with identification with Afis and recently FRONZAROLI 2003a, p. 141–142, who excludes Afis as a possible candidate for *Áb-zu^{ki}* (*Apsu*) because of its vicinity to Ebla and proposes to locate this toponym in the region of Homs (where also Karaman and Ib'al should be located).

44. AMADASI GUZZO 2005.

45. Among the numerous carved basalt flakes also a fragment of an Old Syrian stele has been found (see MAZZONI 2005, p. 10; D'AMORE 2005, p. 18–19).

46. SOLDI 2005, fig. 20, 2–4; 9–11.

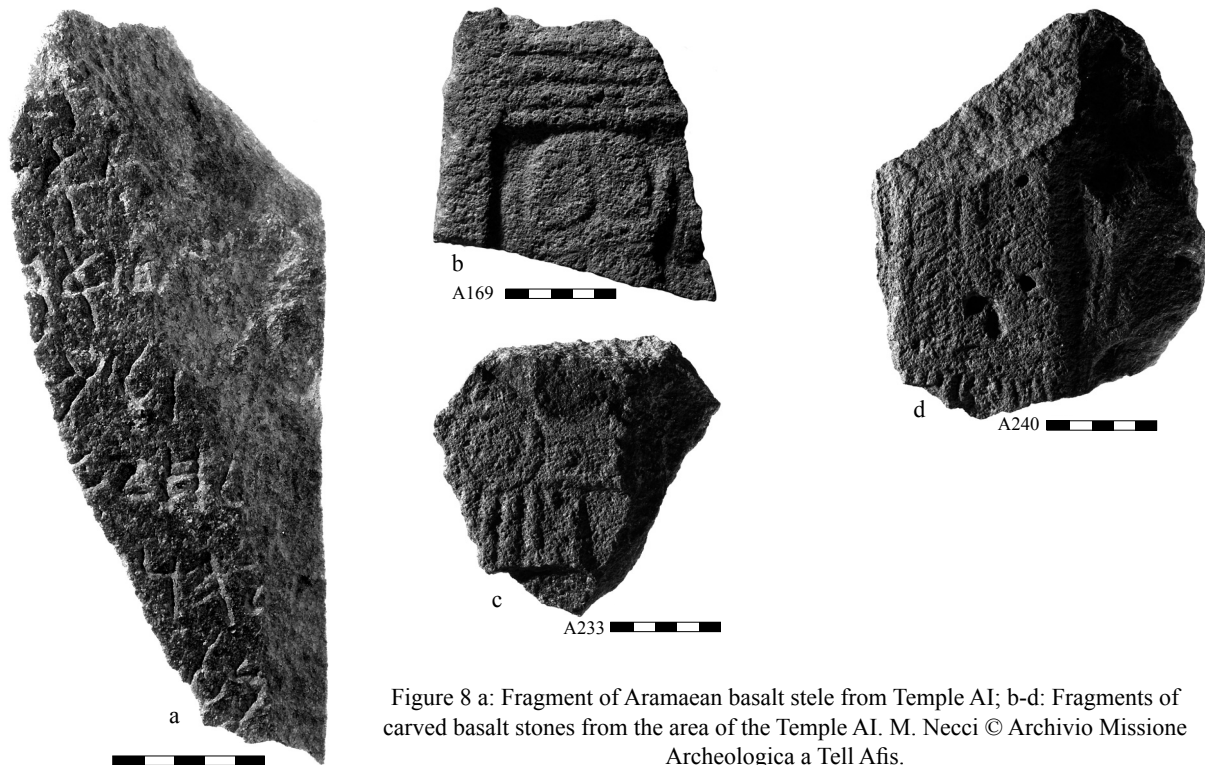


Figure 8 a: Fragment of Aramaean basalt stele from Temple AI; b-d: Fragments of carved basalt stones from the area of the Temple AI. M. Necci © Archivio Missione Archeologica a Tell Afis.

A striking parallel for the Afis funnels comes from Zincirli, where the so-called *Rohr-Ringe* described by Walter Andrae⁴⁷ have been found in the area of the *Nördliche Hallenbau*, dated to the period of king Bar-Rakib (**fig. 11a**). Unfortunately, the only published item comes from a pit south of the *Hilani III* where the *Handkonsolen* were also found (**fig. 11b**), so that we do not know if they belong to a period previous to or subsequent to the edification of the area under the reign of Bar-Rakib (c. 730-710 BC)⁴⁸. Robert Koldewey also reports that numerous items such as these have been found in the *Nördliche Hallenbau*, but they are not published in the catalogue⁴⁹ and similar items were found in the Palace of Sargon II in Khorsabad, where they could have functioned as devices for lighting or ventilation. Rings such as those from Zincirli are described by Victor Place from the room 22 of the *serail* in Khorsabad as “manchons en terre cuite”⁵⁰: they resemble the Afis funnels, but are shorter and without the glazed horned end. Victor Place stresses the location where the pipes have been found arguing their architectural function from the context, which he hypothesises to be part of the ventilation and lighting of the vaulted chambers⁵¹. The comparisons of the few data available, keeping in mind the historical data of the reigns of Sargon II (721–705) and Bar Rakib (c. 733–711) as chronological references, lead us to think we are dealing here with some materials which could have been used as architectural devices in northern Syria and Assyria at about the same time from the second half of 8th century up to the 7th century.

47. ANDRAE 1943, p. 60–61, Taf. 31, f–g.

48. See recently PUCCI 2008 for discussion on Zincirli building phases, and *Ibid.*, p. 72–73, for the provenance of clay fists and glazed rings. See also LEHMANN 1996, p. 279.

49. KOLDEWEY 1898, p. 167

50. PLACE 1867-70, p. 54–55, Pl. 67, 11–14.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 315–316.

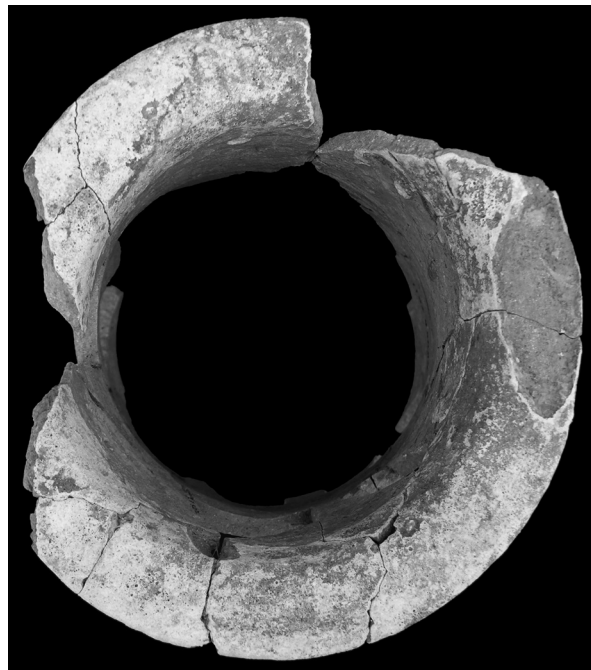


Figure 9: Clay funnels from Temple AI. S. Soldi © Archivio Missione Archeologica a Tell Afis.

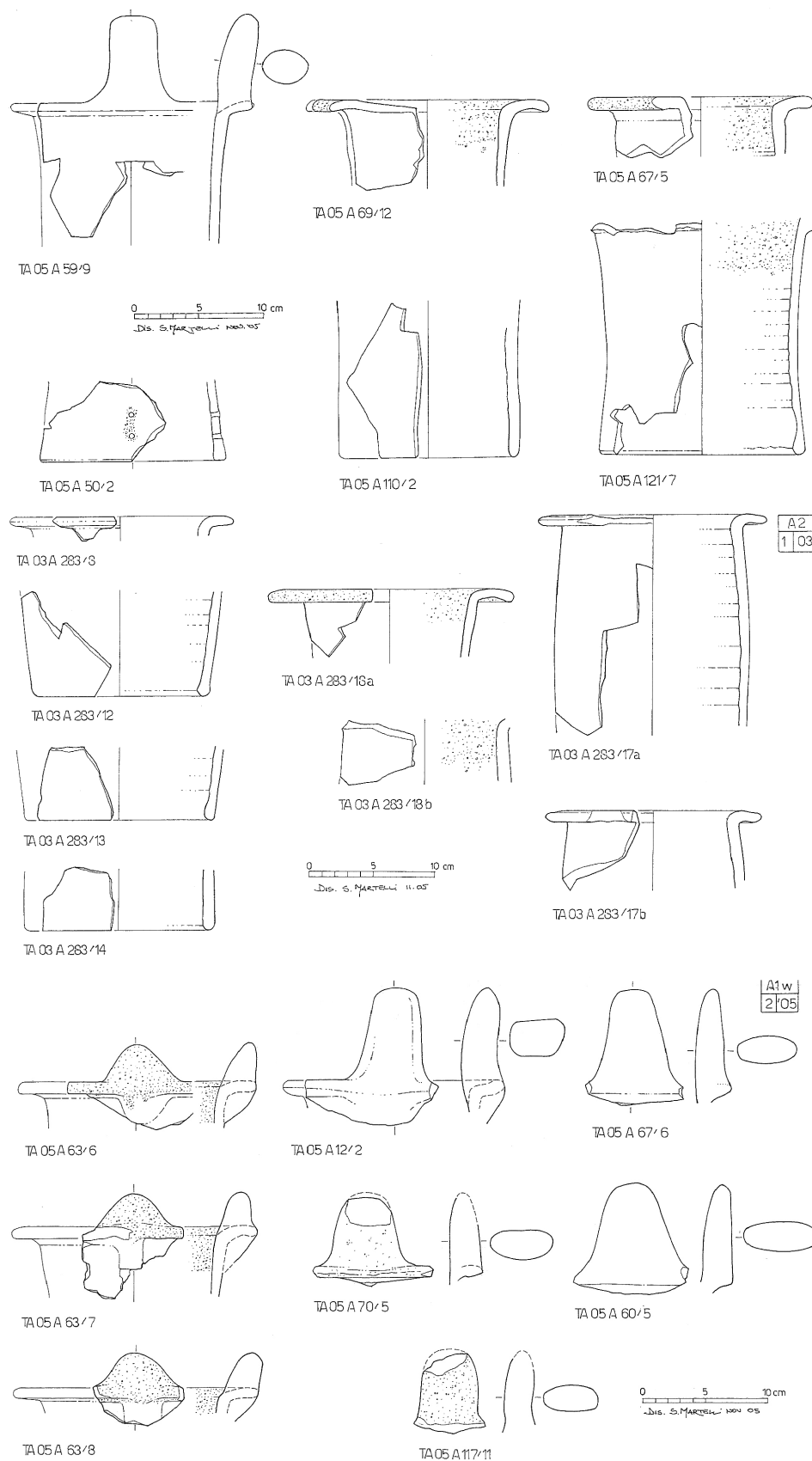


Figure 10: Clay funnels from Temple AI. S. Martelli © Archivio Missione Archeologica a Tell Afis.

It is of course too early to hypothesize an origin and to define the exact function for these items⁵², but we can confidently affirm that architects from northern Syria and from Assyria were using similar devices as part of monumental buildings⁵³.

In any case, it is remarkable that this technique of glazed artefacts first appears within a monumental building in Afis in this last phase of great architectural development of the settlement⁵⁴. We can also recall that historical sources recording details of the construction of Sargon's new capital Dûr Šarrukin between 717 and 706 BC⁵⁵, mention, among workers from all over the empire, the presence of a squad from Hatarikka involved in moulding large bricks for the terrace and in glazing bricks, probably for the gateways⁵⁶.

Although it is very hard to give a firm date at the moment for the first erection of the great temple, because of the poor state of preservation, we can suppose that in Assyrian times the building was actively restored and still served as a primary cult place on the citadel. Various restorations of the white plastered floors on the western side of the structure testify how continuous care was taken to keeping the building in good order until its last moment of activity⁵⁷. We suppose that this care was taken during the last period of the town, when Hazrek/Hatarikka would have been the residence of an Assyrian governor⁵⁸.



Figure 11 a: “Rohr-Ringe” from Zincirli Nördliche Hallenbau (from ANDRAE 1943, Taf. 31, f-g); b: “Handkonsolen” from Zincirli Nördliche Hallenbau (from ANDRAE 1943, Taf. 31, d-e).

52. Concerning Syria it is worth to mention that “clay nails” in the shape of long pipes have been found near the Baal and Astarte temples and in front of the entrance of the fourth Temple in *chantier* M in Late Bronze Age Emar: they were probably inserted into the walls, decorating the façades of the buildings (MARGUERON 1982, p. 32–34; MARGUERON 1993, p. 467, n. 352–353). The Emar items are longer than the Iron Age ones, and have a closed end which can be plain or tapering; they are probably more similar in shape and function to the Mesopotamian nail tradition, but could be an interesting prototype for the Afis and Zincirli ones.

53. Even the founding in Zincirli of the glazed rings together with *Handkonsolen* (or clay fists, see PELTENBURG 1968; MOOREY 1994, p. 314–315) points towards contacts between northern Syrian and Assyria, even though the uncertainty of the provenance contexts makes further speculations more difficult on the subject (PUCCI 2008, p. 73). Glazed clay fists with the shape of arm and hand are also recorded in Khorsabad (PLACE 1867–70, p. 234; ALBENDA 1986, p. 98) and Aššur (PREUSSER 1955, p. 21; Taf. 14, b; Taf. 17).

54. Among the few examples of glazed artefacts from the western acropolis, we can recall an interesting fragment of a glazed bottle of Iron II coming from Level 1 of Area E2 (DEGLI ESPOSTI 1998, p. 244; fig. 15, 1): the specimen belongs to a well known typology labelled as “Al Mina glazed ware” (see PELTENBURG 1969).

55. ALBENDA 1986, p. 35–36.

56. FALES & POSTGATE 1995, p. XV–XVIII; see in particular Text n° 21, p. 21. For archaeological evidence of glazed bricks at Khorsabad city gates, see ALBENDA 1986, p. 41.

57. SOLDI 2005, p. 26 (white plastered floor 6130, westward of wall 5139).

58. HAWKINS 1982, p. 425.

More interesting items coming from the area of the temple are represented by a group of fragments of painted clay vessels, probably used as incense burners (**fig. 12a–b**). These elements come from the area in front of the southern façade of the temple, where some fragments of the horned funnels and some shaped backed bricks have been found, close to the stone threshold; they all belong to the last documented phase of the temple, i.e. the level underneath the topsoil. These vessels show a remarkable surface finishing, are painted in two colors and accurately burnished. The plastic decoration of triangular fringes and rounded petals lead us to think of these items as cultic stands kept inside or at the very entrance of the temple. Interesting comparisons can be found at al-Mina Level 8⁵⁹, Tell Mastuma⁶⁰ and Zincirli⁶¹ (**fig. 13a–e**). The Zincirli and al-Mina comparisons are particularly striking because of the bichrome painting and the presence of petals. Lehmann proposes a date for the Zincirli examples of the 7th century BC⁶². In Syria a new decorated example with black and red alternated bands has been found recently in Mishrifeh Operation J (Phase J 1)⁶³. The date proposed by archaeologists for Phase J 1 can be placed in a Late Iron Age III horizon (late 7th to early 6th century), which harmonises well with the Afis documentation. The origin for such materials can be traced back to a Phoenician cultic background, as some attestation on the Levantine coast can confirm⁶⁴.

More comparisons can be found also with the Iron Age cultic stands from the Southern Levant⁶⁵: two examples from Megiddo Iron IIA have bichromic decoration with concentric circles and pendants on the exterior of the bowl (**fig. 13f–g**)⁶⁶, like the Afis examples. One more item with pendants on the stand has been found in the IA IIB stratum from Tell es-Safi (**fig. 13h**)⁶⁷.

Some comparison with the Afis exemplars can also be sought in iconographic sources, as reviewed by Eric Gubel in his proposal to identify elements of the *marzeah* rite within the relief scene from Niniveh of king Aššurbanipal banqueting in an outdoor setting. The Belgian scholar identifies the petals of the stand as a mark of a Levantine type of incense burner, well attested in Phoenicia and Palestine⁶⁸.

Some elements which show a strong and direct connection of Afis to the Assyrian *milieu* are also present at the site. Three frit seals engraved in Assyrian style have been found on the acropolis⁶⁹; two of them come from the upper levels of Area A (**fig. 14a–b**)⁷⁰, although not directly related to the floors of the temple; the third has been found on the surface between Areas A and G (**fig. 14c–d**)⁷¹. Two of them present a typical Neo-Assyrian contest scene between an archer and a dragon, a type very common in the Mesopotamian heartland as well as in the western provinces⁷². Mazzoni attributes these examples to an 8th–7th century horizon, at a time when this kind of material arrived in western Syria during the Neo-Assyrian domination of the region⁷³. It is worth noting that this class of seals has not been found

59. LEHMANN 1996, Taf. 30: 179/1–2; see also p. 394.

60. *Ibid.*, Taf. 30: 179/3.

61. LEHMANN 1994, p. 114, n. 5–6; ANDRAE 1943, 56, Abb. 64–65, Taf. 23: d–e.

62. LEHMANN 1994, p. 115.

63. MORANDI BONACOSI 2008, p. 121, fig. 44.

64. CULICAN 1980, p. 85–86, fig. 1 (from Akhziv); Vassos Karageorghis connects some examples from Cyprus to Phoenician influences in the religious rituals on the island (KARAGEORGHIS 1996, p. 78–79).

65. AMIRAN 1970, p. 304–306; n° 342, 341, 349 from Megiddo, dated to Iron Age I.

66. GRUTZ 2007, fig. 7.6.1: 1; 7.6.2: 5.

67. *Ibid.*, fig. 7.7.2: 3.

68. GUBEL 1989, p. 48–50; GUBEL 1992, p. 452–453; NIEMEYER 1970, p. 98; see also GALLING 1922, Taf. 14, 52–53. At the time of writing the following book was not available to me: B. MORSTADT, *Phönizische Thymiateria. Zeugnisse des Orientalisierungsprozesses in Mittelmeerraum. Originale Funde, bildliche Quellen, originaler Kontext*, AOAT, 354, Münster, Ugarit-Verlag, 2008.

69. See detailed analysis and comparisons in MAZZONI 2008b, with bibliography.

70. TA.72.232. (MAZZONI 1990, p. 217–218; MAZZONI forthcoming b, fig. 3, d); TA.03.A.186 (MAZZONI 2008b, fig. 3).

71. TA.97.G.450 (MAZZONI forthcoming b, fig. 4, b; MAZZONI 2008b, fig. 2a–b).

72. See examples from Nimrud (MALLOWAN 1966, p. 297, n. 272), Tell Sheikh Hammad (Dûr-Katlimmu) (BONATZ, KÜHNE & MAHMOUD 1998, p. 122, cat. N. 114), Al Mina Level 8 (WOOLLEY 1938, p. 161; Pl. XV: MN 360) and more comparisons in MAZZONI 2008b, p. 156 (Aššur, Tell Knedig, Tell Halaf, Tell Abou Danne).

73. MAZZONI 2008b, p. 156.

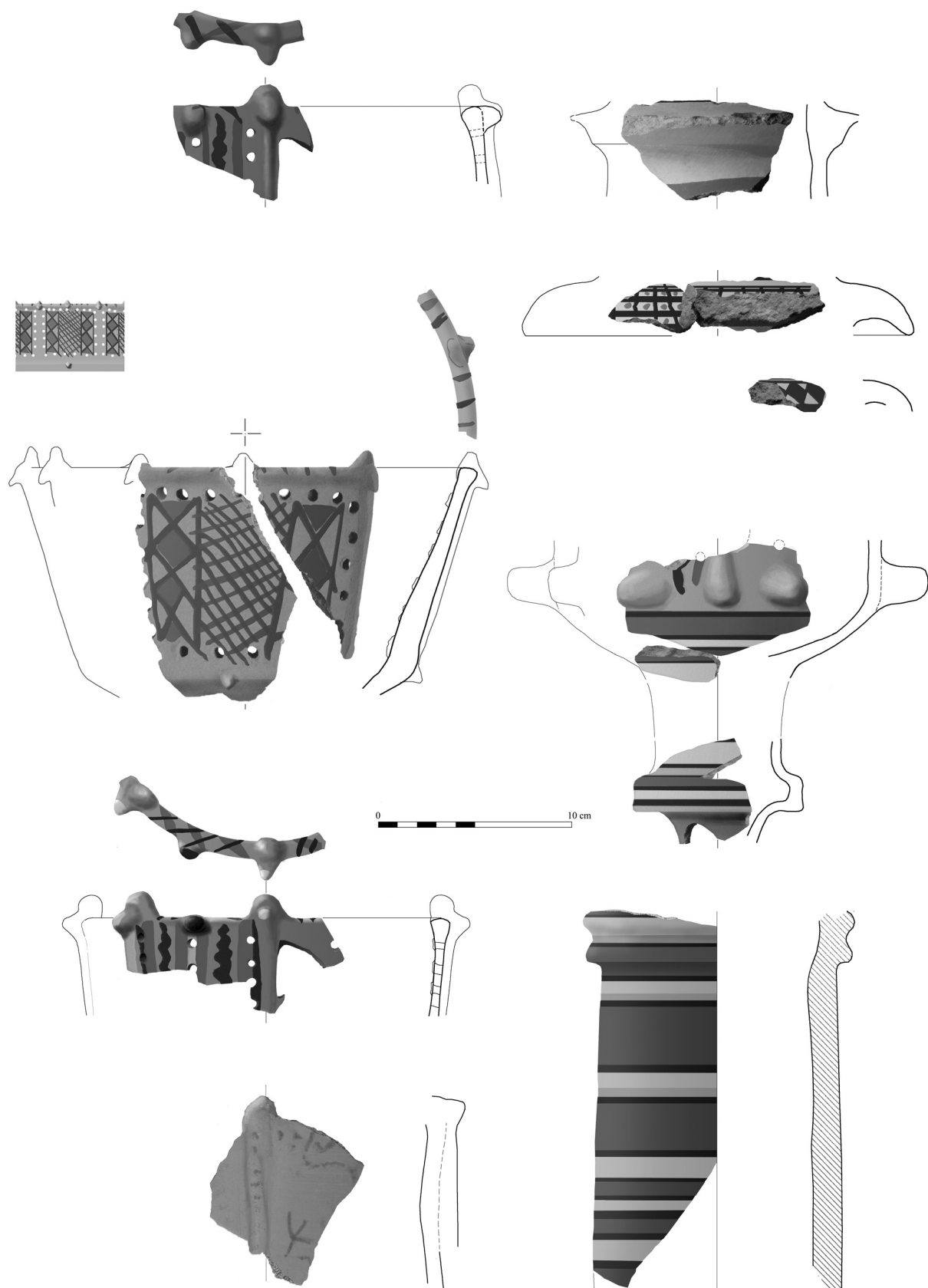


Figure 12 a: Fragments of painted incense burners from Temple AI. S. Martelli © Archivio Missione Archeologica a Tell Afis.

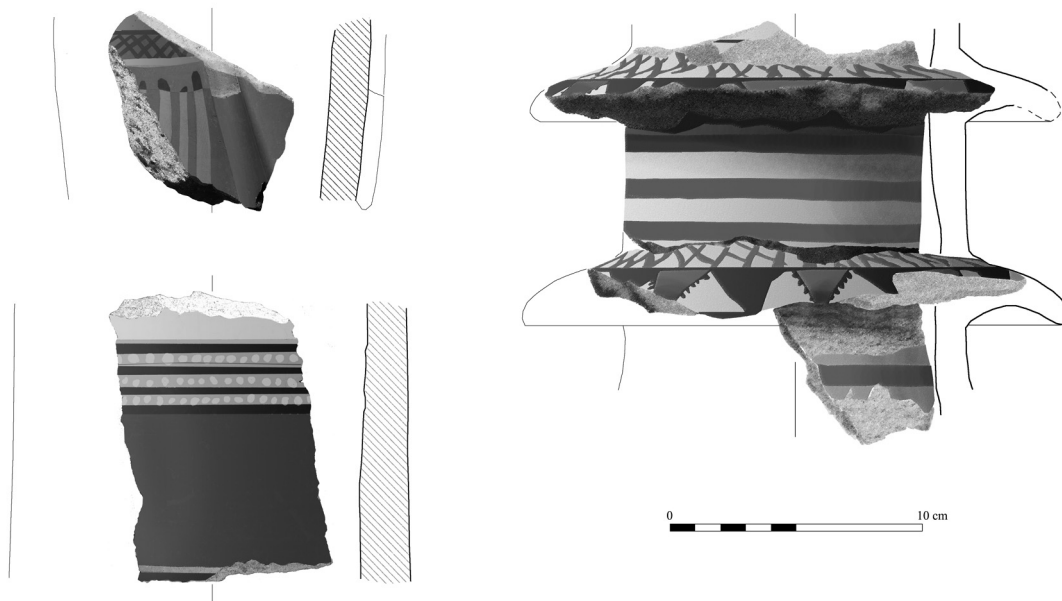


Figure 12 b: Fragments of painted incense burners from Temple AI.
S. Martelli. © Archivio Missione Archeologica a Tell Afis.

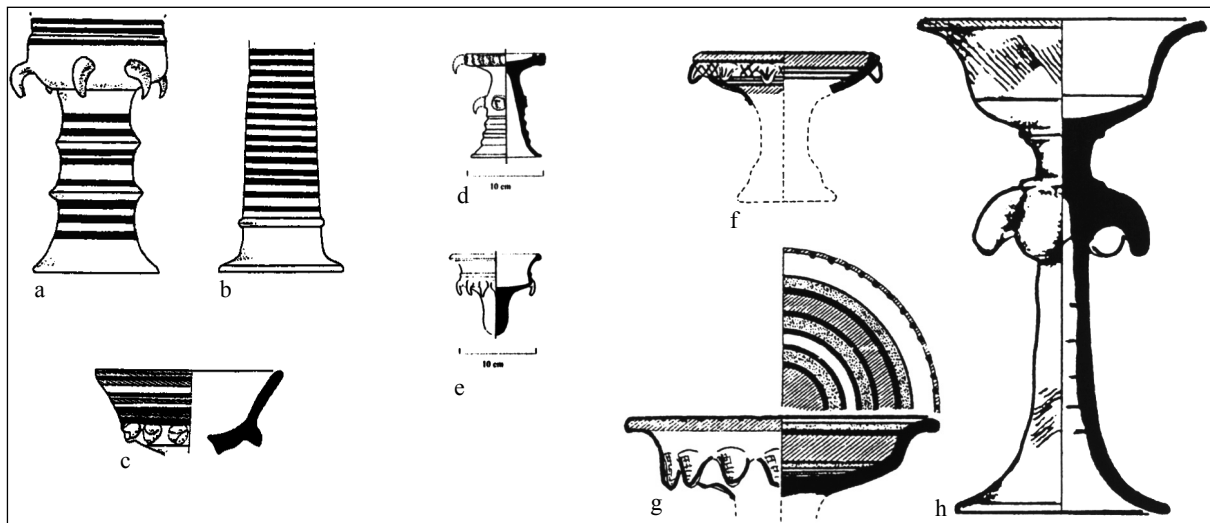


Figure 13 a-b: Incense burners from Al Mina (from LEHMANN 1996, Taf. 30, 179:1-2); c: Tell Mastuma (from LEHMANN 1996, Taf. 30, 179:3); d-e: Zincirli (from LEHMANN 1994, 114, n. 5-6); f-g: Megiddo (from GRUTZ 2007, fig. 7.6.1: 1; 7.6.2 :5); h: Tell es-Safi (from GRUTZ 2007, fig. 7.7.2: 3).

in Hama, probably confirming the fact that Hama is not mentioned between the new provincial capitals in the Assyrian empire⁷⁴, whereas Hazrek/Hatarikka would have been the residence of a local governor⁷⁵.

On the western side of the temple, underneath the fallen mud bricks of the western outer wall, a bronze carinated bowl has been found (fig. 15). It belongs to a class of Assyrian bronze bowls which had a wide distribution from Assyria to Syria and the Levant between the 9th and 7th centuries BC⁷⁶.

From the collected evidence it is clear that the temple of Area A, which can be regarded as a typical Syrian temple, was in use during Iron Age III, and might have been conserved and restored by the Assyrian kings through their local governors. Materials from the area of the temple can give a *terminus ante quem* for its last period of use, but until now no good evidence can furnish data on the date of its construction; we cannot exclude, as already stated by Matthiae at the time of the first excavations on the acropolis of Afis, that the building might have been erected during an earlier date, probably in the 8th century BC⁷⁷, when Afis would have played a primary and independent role in the region.

CONCLUSIONS

We can now present a general picture of Afis between the 8th and 7th centuries as a lively urban centre in the context of a complex political and cultural scenario. The city of the Aramaean Zakkur passed through times of wars and struggles between Aramaean kingdoms and the military advent of Assyria. Archaeological records testify that the town was still flourishing and expanded during Assyrian times and a large religious building was still active on its acropolis. Even though no architectural trace of an Assyrian political residence has been detected yet, the archaeological evidence is now more harmonised with historical records. A sequence of temples from the late Iron Age I to Iron Age III has been excavated on the western side of the acropolis, culminating with the imposing temple *in antis* of the latest period. The erection of a temple was mentioned in Zakkur's stele and we can now prove that an important religious centre did indeed exist on the acropolis of Afis, where inscriptions and stone decorations were once displayed. During this same period the town was still at its maximum extension and was one of the largest settlements in the region between Hama and Aleppo.

The Aramaean town does not seem to come to an end with the arrival of Assyrian armies and the reduction of this region to an Assyrian province in 738 BC under king Tiglath-pileser III. Royal inscriptions mention Hazrek/Hatarikka as one of the provinces of the Empire: several mentions, from the times of Sargon II to Sennacherib and Esarhaddon testify that Hatarikka was ruled by a governor and contributed in several ways to the life of the Empire. We know from texts that the governor of Hatarikka participated with his workers in the construction of the capital of Sargon II in Khorsabad⁷⁸; the stele from Tell Acharneh, a large site north-west of Hama, indicates that Sargon II erected one of his victory stele in Hatarikka after the defeat of Hamath in 720 BC⁷⁹ and the Eponym Chronicle mentions the name of a governor for Hatarikka in 689, during Sennacherib's reign⁸⁰. Evidence which has emerged from the

74. MAZZONI 2008b, p. 156; on Hama and Manšuate in Assyrian times see HAWKINS 1995a, p. 97; an Assyrianized seal with archer and winged human-headed bull has been found in Tell Rifa' at Level 2, usually identified with Aramaean Arpad and transformed in Assyrian province in the years around 740 BC under King Tiglath-pileser III (SETON WILLIAMS 1961, p. 74–75; Pl. XLI, 1; on the reduction of Arpad to Assyrian province, see recently KAHN 2007, p. 84–85).

75. Hatarikka is still mentioned as administrative district in the Eponym Chronicle in 689 at the time of king Sennacherib under a satrap named Gaḥilu/Gihilu (UNGNAD 1938, p. 427; p. 447; LUCKENBILL 1968, II, p. 438); it is also attested in Esarhaddon's times (HAWKINS 1982, p. 425; see also FALES & POSTGATE 1992, p. 125).

76. See examples from Aššur graves (MIGLUS 1996, Taf. 67, c); see also HAMILTON 1966, p. 3–7. This shape stretches to late Iron Age and Persian period (see exemplars from Deve Hüyük in MOOREY 1980, p. 36–37; fig. 6: 104–109).

77. MATTHIAE 1979, p. 4.

78. See above, note n. 56.

79. FRAME 2006, 49; p. 52.

80. See above, note n. 75.

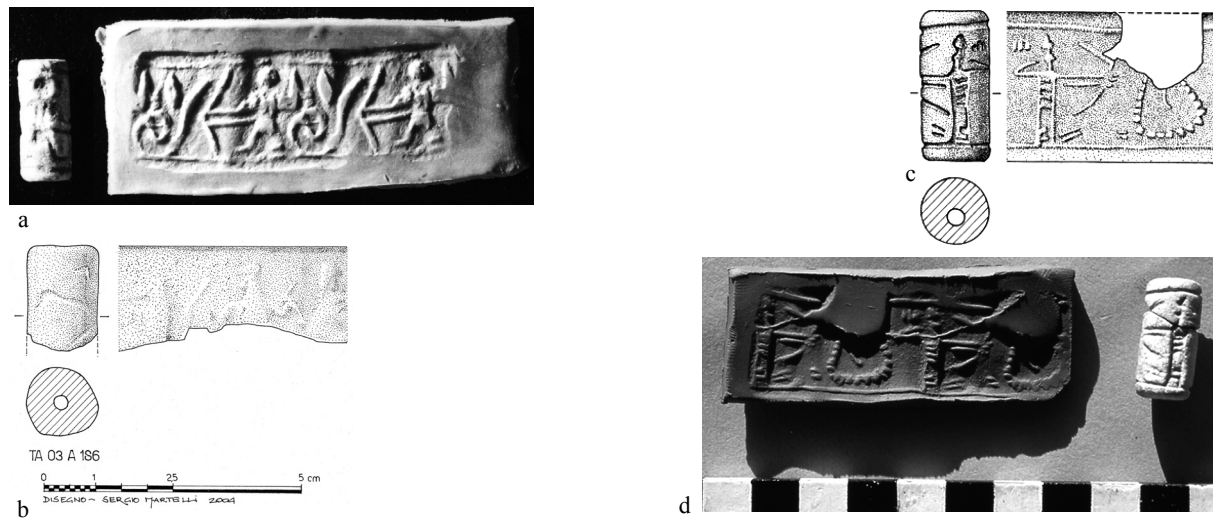


Figure 14: Neo-Assyrian cylinder seals from the Acropolis of Tell Afis (a: TA.72.232; b: TA.03.A.186; c-d: TA.97.G.450)

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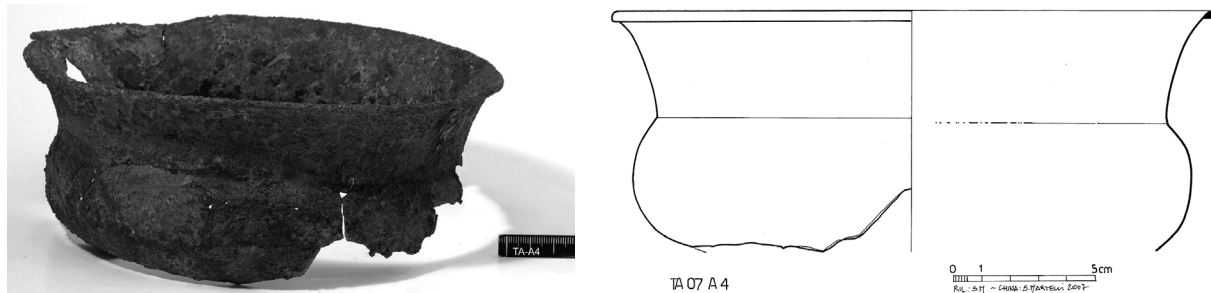


Figure 15: Neo-Assyrian bronze bowl from the collapse of the western mud brick wall of Temple AI M, M. Necci, S. Martelli © Archivio Missione Archeologica a Tell Afis.

latest excavations show how Afis was effectively still a lively centre during the Assyrian domination of western Syria⁸¹, although no epigraphic record from this period has come to support the work of archaeologists.

In the face of the scarcity iconographic and epigraphic documents we are left with the material culture with which to evaluate the level of interaction between Aramaean and Assyrian components at the site. Whereas pottery does not support our aim because of its homogeneity and because of the persistence of local traditions throughout the period⁸², we can identify traces of Assyrian elements such as the seals and the bronze bowl, and traditions typical of western regions, such as the painted incense burners and the religious architectural plan. The coexistence of these different elements and the presence for the first time at the site of glazed materials employed as architectural elements can point towards an issue of a certain cultural interaction during the last period of the town.

If our interpretation of the archaeological records coming from the area of the temple is correct, we are dealing here with a religious monument belonging to the Aramaean town which was not dismissed

81. Other sites seem to suffer a reduction in size and development after the destruction of Hama by Sargon II; see the case of Mishrifeh, which from a flourishing Iron II site has a more sparse outer wall occupation attested by Iron III materials (MORANDI BONACOSI 2006, p. 108); a similar phenomenon occurs in Tell Acharneh where the Canadian expedition has identified occupation layers with materials from Iron II and late Iron II-early Iron III, but no evidence for Iron III and Assyrian presence (COOPER & FORTIN 2004, p. 22; p. 48).

82. MAZZONI 2000b, p. 54–55.

in Assyrian times, but was always restored and kept in perfect order. The typical Syrian plan is a clear indicator of local traditions across the centuries, whereas some elements of material culture testify to its still prominent role in Assyrian times. The coexistence of these two traditions, elsewhere clearly evident from iconographic and artistic elements or from epigraphic and linguistic records, could be an interesting witness of the new cultural and political *koinè* of the Neo-Assyrian empire, when the last elements of acculturation and mutual influence between Aramaeans, absorbed in a new political system, and Assyrians, absorbing new cultural influences from various regions of the Empire, give rise to a new ecumenical inter-cultural mix.